

# FAMILY MATTERS

**THE LOCKDOWN IS PUTTING PRESSURE ON FAMILY AND RELATIONSHIPS, WHETHER YOU ARE IN THE MIDDLE OF A DIVORCE, BEING MENTALLY OR PHYSICALLY ABUSED OR HAVE KIDS IN SPLIT HOMES, IT IS A VERY DIFFICULT TIME. RITA GUPTA FROM LGFL LTD — LEIPER GUPTA FAMILY LAWYERS UPDATES US ON CURRENT ISSUES**

As the UK battles to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, family lawyers like me across the UK have been inundated with enquiries in unprecedented circumstances. As a family law specialist, the past few weeks have been some of the most challenging in my career. It's safe to say that they didn't teach us how to deal with a global pandemic at law school. Since the UK went into lockdown, and following the initial uncertainty about the government's guidance and then future clarification, a whole host of new family law issues have emerged. From parents wanting to know how their child arrangements order or agreement stands, to matrimonial assets being severely impacted by the widespread economic devastation, Covid 19 has had a dramatic impact on cases.

As a practitioner who believes in giving pragmatic and holistic advice, my first priority was to information share to those who I felt would be most in need of help and as

a parent and child law specialist my main concern has been the impact on the children. Whilst the country rallies together and shows incredible collaboration, it's been incredibly disappointing to see parents feuding during the current crisis, and being unable to reach appropriate agreements. In some cases, it has been sad to see parents unable to see the bigger picture of what really is life and death, and even use the current circumstances as an opportunity to change arrangements and obstruct a child spending time with the other parent and extended family. For grandparents who only see their grandchildren during this time, this adds a double layer of detachment and distance for both the child and the wider family.

Recognising this, my first action was to make a series of informative videos to share encouraging parents to co-parent during the circumstances. The courts are currently sinking in applications, re-

listings, adjournments and new cases whilst grappling with new technology. The President's Guidance on family law matters and that from Cafcass was a welcome relief and gave a framework for how parents should be approaching matters. But family law has always been filled with shades of grey and parent's views will often differ on their children's welfare. I would say that every parent will ultimately need to be accountable for the decisions that they make during this process which can be scrutinised with the court at a later date. Put your children first is my best advice.

Another of my greatest concerns has been the increased risk of domestic violence and psychological and emotional abuse during this period. Being in lockdown is challenging for the best of us, but to be in those circumstances with your abuser, would be something that would be impossible to comprehend for most. For that



Photograph by Shireen Scott photography

# FAMILY PRESSURE

reason, I created an information fact sheet with national and local numbers of organisations that could help. When time is of the essence to secure your safety and seek help, you don't have the luxury to conduct an in-depth Google search! Whilst the media often focuses on the impact on women, as a practitioner I can vouch for the fact that there are many men who also are subjected to abusive behaviours and should not be overlooked. The most vulnerable are the children, many of whom would previously have the sanctuary of their schools, are now at home 24/7, being exposed to parental conflict and abusive behaviours. The media story of the 14-year-old boy who walked in his pyjamas to a radio station after a feature about domestic violence was heart breaking but showed the importance of raising awareness at this time so that all victims can access help.

With my Boutique MD hat on, lockdown and other virtual connections can lead to amazing creativity and new opportunities for those businesses who are agile, willing to embrace change and can diversify. As a modern law firm, we've always embraced technology, but the last few weeks have seen us take this to the next level. This has enabled us to offer a complete family law service remotely, to the point where we have now launched a full online director led nationwide family

law service. A virtually bespoke service! I've also launched our firm's podcast called 'The Modern Family Lawyer'.

Over the past few weeks, I've found myself answering questions that I've never had to answer before, and given some very candid advice to my clients, because at the end of the day family matters, in law and in life.

Rita Gupta is co-founder of LGFL Ltd, a boutique family law firm in Berkshire. She is a Recommended lawyer in the Legal 500 and a Recognised Practitioner in Chambers and Partners, a former Venus Finalist for Hampshire Professional of the year 2017 and Lawyer Monthly's Family Lawyer of the year 2017.

Rita is also Managing Director of The Boutique MD Ltd, a peer consultancy aimed at decision-makers of boutique law firms and businesses.



<https://www.cafcass.gov.uk/grown-ups/parents-and-carers/covid-19-guidance-for-children-and-families/>



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